

# A New Shepherd for Seattle

On December 1, 2010, Archbishop-Elect J. Peter Sartain will be installed as the Ninth Bishop, Fifth Archbishop of Seattle. All are welcome to attend the installation liturgies, Tuesday, November 30 at 7:00pm, and Wednesday, December 1 at 2:00pm. As we prepare for this historic event, we look back at the bishops who have ministered here in Western Washington over the past 160 years.

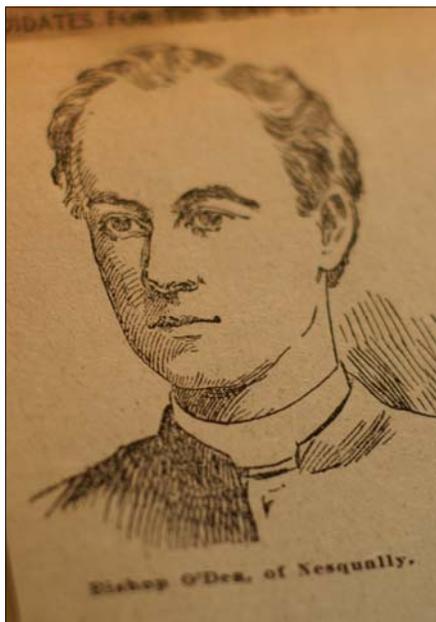
## THE BOY BECOMES A BISHOP

Bishop Junger's unexpected death on the day after Christmas, 1895, left the diocese of Nesqually without a shepherd. Many names of priests to succeed Bishop Junger were suggested and discussed, but gradually three emerged as the front runners. There was the famous Father Peter Hylebos of Tacoma—the pioneer. There was Father Peter Yorke of San Francisco – the firebrand. And there was Father Edward O'Dea of Portland—the boy.

O'Dea was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts in 1856, but as a child moved with his family to the west coast, settling first in San Francisco, and then in Portland. O'Dea's vocation to the priesthood was nurtured from an early age by the venerable Archbishop Blanchet of Portland and by the famous Mother Joseph of the Sisters of Providence, who was a friend of O'Dea family. He studied at the Grand Seminaire in Montreal, and was ordained at 26. He became secretary to Archbishop Gross and served at the Portland cathedral for a number of years, and later as pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Portland.

O'Dea must have known that he was rumored for Nesqually, but it still came as quite a shock when a newspaper reporter came knocking at his rectory door in July of 1896. "We have a dispatch from Rome saying you have been appointed Bishop of Nesqually; have you anything to say?" O'Dea replied with characteristic circumspection: "I haven't a thing to say, and this is the first I have heard of it." But in this case, rumor spoke true, and the news was officially announced on July 23, 1896.

The Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle preserve a scrapbook in which O'Dea himself carefully kept the dozens of congratulatory telegrams and letters he received, along with newspaper clippings from newspapers large and small from all over the Northwest. He was a popular fellow, and the messages of congratulation are exude genuine enthusiasm. "Ten thousand times ten thousand congratulations, *ad multos annos*," wrote a friend from San Francisco. "I do not know when I have ever read an announcement in the morning paper that has pleased me more than the account I read of your appointment this morning," said a Portland parishioner. "In every Catholic home in the Great State of Washington this is a day of rejoicing and thanksgiving," wrote an exuberant Tacoma man. Carefully mounted on its own page in the scrapbook is an exquisitely penned letter from Sister Rose of Lima of the Holy Names: "Claiming the privilege of a former teacher, I hasten to convey to your Lordship heartfelt congratulations blended with esteem."



Even the newspapers were enthusiastic about the appointment. A Portland paper reported, "Rev. Edward O'Dea is a man of decidedly pleasing appearance and address. He is rather tall and dark, and looks scarcely 30, though he is nearly 40.... Father O'Dea is unquestionably one of the most popular Catholic clergymen of the Northwest." (This was probably the only occasion on which O'Dea was ever described as "tall"!)

The article went on to explain how bishops were chosen in the Catholic Church: three names were submitted to Rome with the Latin designations *dignus*, *dignior*, and *dignissimus*—worthy, more worthy, and most worthy. O'Dea, the writer confidently states, was the most worthy: "By 'dignissimus' is doubtless conveyed the impression of 'all around best fellow.'"

Not everyone was delighted at O'Dea's appointment, however. Some of the veterans of the Diocese of Nesqually felt that O'Dea, who was just 39 at the time of his appointment, lacked both experience and understanding to administer the diocese well. But Father Hylebos himself felt differently. He was among the first to write to O'Dea, saying, "I welcome you to the highest position in our diocese from my very heart, in all candor and with the best of wishes. I will openly tell you that whilst the name of Father Schram and mine had been on the lips of many people in connection with the succession to Rt. Revd. Junger, it is just right to give it to neither of us: I have prayed to that effect, and I take solid comfort in your appointment. Now you know exactly how I stand."

After a tearful farewell in Portland, O'Dea was consecrated Bishop of Nesqually at St. James Cathedral, Vancouver, on September 8, 1896. The vestments he wore had been prepared by the loving hands of the Sisters with whom he had worked in Portland: Mother Joseph herself embroidered the slippers he would use during the liturgy, while the Holy Names Sisters provided his gold miter and lace alb.

Interestingly, among the letters Bishop O'Dea preserved in his scrapbook are three of a different sort. Prominent businessmen and clergy of Tacoma, Spokane, and Seattle all wrote to O'Dea in that first month following his appointment, urging him to move his residence and his see to their cities. Tacoma boasted of its healthful climate, beautiful situation, and magnificent homes. Spokane was the wealthiest city in the state. But Seattle was growing faster than either of them.... The youthful Bishop of Nesqually clearly had his work cut out for him: enough to keep him busy for *thirty-seven* long and remarkable years of ministry.

—Corinna Laughlin